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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002180

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THE RED-SHIRTS ARE COMING....AGAIN

REF: A. BANGKOK 2167 (KING BHUMIBOL WARNS OF RUIN)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2125 (ABHISIT LOSES POLICE CHIEF BATTLE)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2034 (RED SHIRTS PETITION THE KING)

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Despite King Bhumibol's August 21 appeal for national unity (REF A), the anti-government United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), aka the "red-shirts," continued preparations for a planned August 30 demonstration. In response, on August 25 Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's cabinet authorized the localized application of the Internal Security Act (ISA) from August 29 through September 1 in the area of the planned protest. The pre-emptive invocation of the ISA will allow the military to deploy in the protest area and coordinate with police authorities in an effort to bolster security and prevent unrest (just as the RTG used the ISA during the July Asean Regional Forum meetings in Phuket). Red-shirt leaders were quick to condemn the move as heavy-handed and vowed to proceed with their protest, despite former PM Thaksin's alleged misgivings about moving forward with the rally. Organizers told us the protest would focus on a demand to dissolve the House of Representatives. Meanwhile, a widely-circulated audio tape that was doctored to make it sound as though PM Abhisit had authorized the use of violence against red-shirts in April has further exacerbated tensions and mistrust between the two sides.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Abhisit's invocation of the ISA underscores government concerns about the potential for unrest on Sunday, as well as its resolve to avoid a repeat of the violence that shook Pattaya and Bangkok earlier this year. Though red-shirt leaders have privately assured us of their commitment to a peaceful demonstration, Abhisit's anxiety appears well-founded given the UDD's woeful track record for keeping its troops in line. Reports of dissension and fragmentation within the red-shirt camp appear to further validate the government's decision to take stronger preparatory measures in advance of the protest. While we anticipate Sunday's protest will in fact be peaceful, we doubt this latest chapter in Thailand's ongoing political

imbroglio will bring the country any closer to reconciliation or the political disagreements closer to resolution. We have issued a Consular Warden warning to Amcits to avoid the protest area. End Summary and Comment.

RED STORM RISING

13. (C) On August 30, approximately 10,000 to 20,000 "red-shirt" sympathizers of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra plan to assemble in the Royal Plaza area of Bangkok in the late afternoon, before marching in unison to the Government House. Red-shirt core leader Vira Musikapong told us August 21 that he planned to address the crowd at the beginning of the rally, touching on ongoing efforts to secure Thaksin's amnesty (REF C), the police chief debate (REF B), and corruption issues. Vira claimed the protestors would disperse around 11pm, emphasizing that the group did not have any intention of carrying out a protracted demonstration.

14. (SBU) Red-shirt co-leader Chatuporn Prompan told the media that red-shirt supporters would come to Bangkok from Udon Thani province (a pro-Thaksin stronghold in the northeast). In public comments, Chatuporn claimed that Prime Minister Abhisit had approved of the rally provided the event remained peaceful. Both Chatuporn and Vira promised to march the red-shirts to the Government House area despite indications the area would be sealed off.

FUELED BY FALSIFIED AUDIO RECORDING?

15. (SBU) The rally comes in the wake of the release of a

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doctored video tape in which PM Abhisit appears to order the use of violence to put down the red riots in April. The PM's voice was clearly altered in the poor quality video, which was widely disseminated in an apparent effort to fan the anti-government flames leading up to the protest. PM Abhisit swiftly criticized the incendiary tactic, and vowed to take legal action against the perpetrators.

16. (C) Pro-red community radio stations in Udon and Bangkok have been playing the "recording" repeatedly this week. This is particularly disturbing given the recent track record of such community radio stations for inciting red violence. Prior to the red riots in April, these same stations called upon supporters to fight the government in the streets and referred to PM Abhisit as part of a treasonous cabal. Red protesters we engaged on visits to the red blockade of Government House in March-April repeatedly called Abhisit a "killer," despite the lack of evidence of any state-sponsored use of violence in the first three months of Abhisit's premiership. The release of the falsified recording seemingly is a repeat of these earlier red-tactics.

ABHISIT INVOKES THE INTERNAL SECURITY ACT

17. (C) No doubt recalling the unruly red-shirt mobs that ran amok in Pattaya and Bangkok in April of this year, PM Abhisit decided to take out an insurance policy against further unrest by announcing August 25 that he would invoke the Internal Security Act (ISA) from August 29 through September 11. The ISA will apply only to the area surrounding the planned protest (Dusit district); it will allow the military to deploy troops and coordinate with law enforcement authorities in order to maintain the peace. Abhisit also invoked the ISA during the July ARF meetings in Phuket, and from a security standpoint, the measure was generally characterized as a success. Media coverage of Abhisit's decision to implement the ISA was extensive, though criticism was largely muted outside of complaints from the UDD camp.

18. (C) According to government spokesperson and ISA co-drafter Dr. Panitan Wattanayakorn, the ISA would allow the government to deny protesters access to the Dusit Palace, Government House and Parliament area, though in all likelihood the red-shirts would be allowed to march from the Royal Plaza to the Government House area. Dr. Panitan noted that while the government had not yet settled on a rules of engagement strategy to use in conjunction with the rally (to be determined at a meeting later in the day), he suspected there would be a systematic plan for gradual escalation in place. Soldiers at the front of the security barrier would not be armed, and in the event of provocation or attack, soldiers at the rear would use water cannons and then tear gas before taking progressively more aggressive measures as warranted. While such an approach was not without its potential risk, Dr. Panitan noted that a lack of clear ground rules for systematic escalation had led to problems during previous protests over the course of the last year and a half. According to media reports, some 3500 soldiers and 1950 police officers will be deployed Sunday.

RED SPLINTERS

19. (C) Against the backdrop of the UDD's next big planned protests, we continue to hear reports of increasing factionalism within the red-shirt camp. Vira Musikapong told us on August 21 that the so-called "June 24" faction (named in honor of the date of the 1932 coup) within the red-shirt movement had become increasingly difficult to manage. He characterized the faction as a group of small "die hard republicans willing to use violence." He said UDD leaders would soon meet in order try to bring order to the red movement and set standards; those who refused to adhere to UDD policies would be expelled from the movement.

110. (C) Human Rights Watch consultant Sunai Phasuk seconded Vira's claims of increasing factionalism within the red-shirt

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camp, telling us August 25 that an increasingly vocal portion of the red-shirt camp was growing impatient and disillusioned with the movement's glacial pace. Sunai guessed that approximately 10 percent of the red-shirts were "radicals" bent on using violence to topple the monarchy. He warned that the moderate leaders were having more and more difficulty reining this radical red-shirt sub-faction in.

THAKSIN ALLEGEDLY REGISTERS HIS UNEASE

111. (SBU) Local media outlets reported that former PM Thaksin Shinawatra had called supporters on August 26, allegedly warning them to avoid the August 30 rally and prevent potential bloodshed. When we asked red-shirt leader Jaran Dittaphichai about these reports, he told us that Thaksin had in fact reached out to several groups of supporters on August 26. According to Jaran, Thaksin had expressed unease about Abhisit's invocation of the ISA and the potential for a violent showdown, as well as registered his concern that the frequency of the red-shirt rallies could ultimately dilute their impact. However, Jaran told us that Thaksin had ultimately stressed that the red-shirt leaders had full authority to proceed as they saw fit, emphasizing that he would back them either way.

JOHN